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ABSTRACT

Residential, familial, and recreational patterns of contemporary U.S. society tend to isolate the young from the old. Sensitivity to this isolation has prompted many human service agencies to seek ways to promote opportunities for constructive and ongoing interactions involving children and older persons. This paper provides insights and descriptions of the development of intergenerational programs. It addresses the following questions: What are intergenerational programs? What needs can they meet? What are some of the basic steps in their creation? and What are some of the characteristics of successful programs? (BT)

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University of Pittsburgh

GENERATIONS TOGETHER

CREATING EFFECTIVE INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

(prepared for *Perspectives on Aging*)

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CREATING EFFECTIVE INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

An interest in intergenerational programs has been growing steadily in the last decade as it has become increasingly evident that the residential, familial and recreational patterns of contemporary American Society tend to isolate the young from the old. Sensitivity to this isolation has prompted many human service agencies to seek ways to promote opportunities for constructive and ongoing interactions involving children, youth and older persons. The purpose of this paper is to provide the reader with insights to, and understanding of, the development of intergenerational programs. To achieve this purpose we will address the following questions: what are intergenerational programs, what needs can they meet, what are some of the basic steps in their creation and what are some of the characteristics of successful programs.

WHAT ARE INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

The National Council on Aging defines intergenerational programs as activities that increase cooperation and exchange between any two generations. Typically however, they involve interaction between the young and the old in which there is a sharing of skills, knowledge, and experience. Integral to all of these programs are experiences that are mutually beneficial, that meet some needs of both populations and that foster growth, understanding and friendship between the generations. Intergenerational programs, furthermore, involve planned activities and ongoing interactions over extended periods of time.

WHAT NEEDS DO INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS MEET?

Intergenerational programs seem to be responding to some needs of both the older and younger generations. For the olders, they address the need to have a significant place in society, to utilize the life experience and wisdom generated during three score or more years of life and the need to nurture and enhance the growth and learning of children. Similarly, they seem to be providing for

children and youth, a special role model, a non-judgmental friend, and a reliable support person who encourages their efforts to learn, grow, and become competent and worthy persons. For both these populations, intergenerational programs offer an opportunity for a human personal "connectiveness" that enhances security and self-esteem.

The emergence of intergenerational programs has been the result of trial and error efforts by vast numbers of persons from various sectors in society. A decade of experimentation by persons in aging, education, child care, higher education and other human service agencies has yielded a variety of intergenerational program models that involve participation by a diversified population of children, youth, and older persons. Intergenerational programs have been developed that include the participation of the young-old and the old-old, from 60 to over 90 years of age, and children and youth from several months to 22 years of age. The old may be the well or the frail elderly and the young may be mainstreamed or special needs (at risk or exceptional) children and youth.

These programs are in evidence in a variety of settings including schools, adult and child care centers, senior citizen centers, nursing homes, churches, centers for children with special needs, detention homes and universities.

PLANNING FOR AN INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAM

In order to develop an intergenerational program that has a likelihood of success it is wise to determine the needs of the agency that can be met by an effective intergenerational program. These needs can be assessed by using an informal or formal needs assessment procedure, e.g., interviews or surveys that may be conducted among the leadership, staff and some representative constituents of the agency. Once these needs are determined it will be necessary to identify a partner agency with whom to collaborate in the program's development. Since intergenerational programs by definition involve and benefit two populations, the young and the old, their success is often a function of the shared planning and continued participation by two agencies representing

these populations. When a partner has been selected, it is appropriate to plan the program. Typical examples of partners may be senior centers and neighborhood schools, child care and adult day care, nursing homes and youth groups. Characteristically there are five steps in the planning process before it is time for the program's implementation.

1) Gain administrative approval from the agencies involved in the project. It is important that key decision makers be involved during the planning phase of the program. Future problems can be avoided if there is a formal endorsement of the program from the beginning.

2) Develop a list of goals and objectives that are clear and realistic and will address the needs of both participating agencies.

3) Convene a meeting of community and agency leaders who can become a resource to the program. This group may then become a task force to help publicize the program and to provide a variety of supportive services to help in its maintenance or expansion.

4) Develop a written plan of the procedures, activities and timeline for the program's implementation.

5) Define the roles and responsibilities of the collaborating agencies. The exact nature of the relationship can be formalized through memoranda of understanding or described in an informal written statement. It is important, however, that the roles of the agency administrators and the program developers be clearly delineated.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Upon completion of the planning process the program's implementation procedures can begin. Typically there are four basic steps in the implementing of an intergenerational program. These are 1) recruitment; 2) orientation and training; 3) maintenance and support and 4) evaluation. The scheduling of these steps and the identification of persons responsible for completing them should be determined before the program implementation begins.

Typical Steps in Program Implementation

RECRUITMENT > ORIENTATION and TRAINING > MAINTENANCE and SUPPORT > EVALUATION

Recruitment

Recruitment refers to those activities that are used to enlist the participants in the program. These activities include presentations to the members or staff of organizations, service groups and systems serving the youth or the elderly, (e.g., senior centers, older adult and youth church groups, schools, Red Cross, youth service groups, nursing homes and personal care boarding homes), the use of the media (newspapers, radio and TV), and the use of printed materials (posters and flyers). Recruitment strategies should be planned and shared by the program staff of the collaborating agencies with assistance from members of the community task force. Recruitment may need to be an ongoing activity as the program develops.

Orientation and Training

Orientation and training refers to those activities designed to increase the participants' effectiveness in and enjoyment of their intergenerational experiences. In preparing for these activities it is important to consider who the participants are (e.g. young children, special needs children, well or frail elderly) and to design appropriate activities that involve sensitizing youth, elders and staff to age related issues, helping staff and participants to work together and preparing the participants for their respective roles. These activities include a series of formal and informal meetings and workshops that help participants:

- understand the goals and objectives of the program;
- become confident of their roles and responsibilities in the program;
- gain increased awareness of the value of linking the generations;
- gain greater insight into their own attitudes about aging;
- develop skills necessary to work effectively in an intergenerational program; and
- establish and strengthen intergenerational relationships.

The orientation and training experiences occur before the participants begin their involvement in the program (pre-service) and at regular intervals throughout the program (in-service). The pre-service experiences provide the participants with the knowledge, and skills necessary to begin their involvement; the in-service experiences help the participants develop and reinforce skills that will contribute to their enjoyment of the program.

Maintenance and Support

Maintenance and support refer to those activities designed to contribute to the effectiveness of the program, to provide reinforcement to the participants, and to secure the future of the program. Examples of these activities include:

- ongoing formal and informal training experiences;
- administrative and staff meetings to review the status of the program and to make recommendations for its future;
- public relations activities that inform the community of the program's development;
- scheduled events that involve members of the community; and
- recognition activities that commend participants and staff for their involvement in the program.

Maintenance and support activities should be included in the program's implementation plan. These activities should include informal acknowledgements as well as formal scheduled events.

Evaluation

Evaluation refers to those activities designed to assess the effectiveness and outcomes of the program. It should serve the needs of the program and be limited to the data which the agency(ies) actually plan(s) to use. Used effectively, the evaluation can help to improve the program, determine the impact of the program, identify ideas for its expansion and garner support from the community. Information for the evaluation can be collected from written surveys and

questionnaires, oral interviews or standardized attitude inventories or anecdotal reports. Information collected as a result of the program evaluation should include:

- the realization of program goals;
- the activities in which the participants are engaged;
- the number of participants; demographic description of the participants;
- the frequency and duration of the intergenerational interactions;
- the impact of the program on the life satisfaction and well being of the older persons;
- the program's impact on the growth and learning of children;
- the program's impact on attitudes toward children, youth and older persons;
- the program's impact on attitudes towards aging; and
- the participants' ideas for improving the program.

Evaluation procedures should be conducted throughout the development of the program and at the end of each program year.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

Successful intergenerational programs that are emerging throughout the country, represent diverse populations in a variety of settings. Their success is measured by the increased understanding and friendships that are developing between the young and the old, the support from the community, the retention of the participants, and the linkages that are created among the agencies serving both the older and younger members of the community. These programs share several common characteristics that seem to be integral to all successful programs. In planning these programs, therefore, activities and procedures should be included that will promote the existence of these characteristics: clearly defined goals and objectives; supportive administrative and programmatic staff collaboration between agencies that represent the younger and older

participants; competent and committed program leadership and staff; sensitivity to the needs and expectations of the participants (young and old, professional and volunteer); a program of manageable size; consistent and meaningful recognition for volunteers and professional participants; and ongoing evaluation procedures.

"Intergenerational Programs" is an idea whose time has come that is consistent with the new federal and state initiatives designed to reconnect our society. These initiatives support the concepts of cross-age community service, cross-generational mentoring, and systematic partnerships that enable public and private agencies and groups to link and support our population across the life span.

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